

Bacterial Vaginosis

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) bacterial vaginosis (BV) is the most common vaginal infection in women of childbearing age. BV occurs when there are changes in the vaginal chemistry that allows unhealthy bacteria, usually present in small amounts in the healthy woman, to overgrow in large numbers. These bacteria do not appear to be transmitted from a sex partner and are present in the vagina at all times.

What are the signs and symptoms?

- Abnormal, thin vaginal discharge that is white or gray
- Fish-like odor, especially after intercourse
- Burning upon urination
- Itching or burning in the vaginal area
- None at all

What are the complications?

Most women have no complications associated with bacterial vaginosis. For those that do, they may include:

Pelvic Inflammatory Disease – The bacteria causes an infection that scars the fallopian tubes and uterus. This leads to infertility (not being able to have a baby) or an ectopic (fertilized egg growing outside of the uterus) pregnancy.

Low Birth Weight – Pregnant women with BV have an increased rate of children who are born early or have low birth weights.

Increased risk of acquiring HIV or another STD – When a woman has BV she has an

increased risk of getting HIV or another STD if she is exposed.

How is BV diagnosed?

A specimen is taken from a woman's vagina and examined under the microscope. The clinician also does a "whiff-test" where they add a chemical to the vaginal secretion and detect a fishy odor.

What is the treatment for BV?

Antimicrobial medicines such as metronidazole or clindamycin are used to cure a female of BV either by mouth or a vaginal cream. A woman being treated for BV must take all of the medication prescribed, even if her symptoms disappear. Because there is no good evidence that males carry and transmit this bacteria, treatment of the woman's male partner is not currently recommended.

How do you prevent transmission?

BV is not very well understood and the ways to prevent it are unclear. It is known that BV is associated with women who have new or multiple sex partners. There are some things that a female can do to reduce the risk of upsetting the natural balance of bacteria in the vagina and developing BV:

- Do not douche (douching gets rid of the good bacteria that protect your vagina)
- Limit the number of sex partners
- Use condoms during sex